

# REVIEWS

## RELEASES TO CONSIDER FOR YOUR COLLECTION



the original sleeves, though the records themselves feature new labels. The albums are packed in a slipcase that draws on the album artwork for *The Dreaming* and *Never For Ever*, but disappointingly, there are no other extras, such as a booklet with liner notes. A lack of quality control can be seen on the spine of *The Kick Inside* jacket; "Inside" is spelled as "Insde." Oops.

There's a definite sound improvement on the remasters versus the originals, particularly from this era. But the bigger draw may simply be that the albums are available on vinyl again. For that reason alone, vinyl fans may want to pick up these reissues sooner than later, before they, too, go out-of-print. Note that it's cheaper to buy the albums in these box sets, than individually.

—Gillian G. Gaar

### SHERYL CROW LIVE AT THE CAPITOL THEATER

Cleopatra (DVD + 2-CD Set)

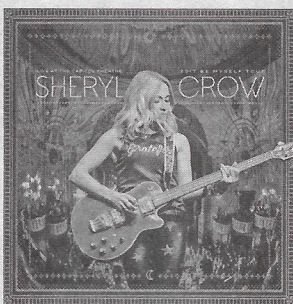
★★★★★

It's hard not to root for Sheryl Crow. She's a cancer survivor who has been public about her bouts with depression. She has

exited some turbulent high profile relationships before the worlds of her former flames came completely apart. And she has done this with a grace and dignity that is impossible not to admire. Along the way, her creative output hasn't waned and her bright upbeat public face has continued to sparkle. So I guess I wasn't expecting very much other than a perfectly fine musical ride when I learned of this latest live release. Part of Crow's plan seems to have always involved a carefully crafted attempt to stay within her lane, and it's worked.

Live albums are a funny thing. They either have a meaningful creative origin (a well talked about specific performance or tour) or they fill gaps and/or meet label output needs doing little more than check a box. This record seems to fall somewhere in-between, leaning toward what I would call a "love letter" to her biggest fans.

Crow has released three live albums now. The first was in 1999, *Live from Central Park*. Here the performance was more about the big name guests that appeared with her on stage than a real collective



expression of what a Sheryl Crow concert is all about. Then came the hard-to-find Japanese release in 2003 from Budokan. That one almost doesn't even count because it's so elusive. This new and third live release is from the infamous Capitol Theater in Port Chester, NY on her recent *Be Myself* tour. A stage occupied by some of the biggest names in rock royalty, its size belies their fame and is remarkably

intimate and communal. Crow leverages that fairly well engaging the room with dance, light-hearted skipping, smirk-drenched taunting, and deep-in-the-groove hair whips and twirls. She has as much fun here as the audience—and they all seemed pretty stoked.

The backing band is a Nashville based who's who of big time Music City talent, almost all of whom at one time supported The Dixie Chicks. Only one remains from that first live record, guitarist Peter Stroud (Don Henley). There's also Black Crowes guitarist Audley Freed, Blair School of Music (Vanderbilt University) professor Jen Gunderman on keys and vocals, Josh Grange on pedal steel, and Robert Kearns on bass. But the real standout of the entire outfit is ACM drummer of the Year, Fred Eltringham. He sits behind a lean Ludwig kit and delivers an almost neverending, thunder-soaked drive to the music that sounds at times like two drummers at work instead of one.

These folks are all at the top of their musical game, and that is on full display here. That said they appear more like session players than live band co-horts leaving all of the theatrics and movement on stage to fall to Crow. That makes the concert seem to have less energy than it should. It's only when The Rolling Stones "Heartbreaker"—inspired "There Goes The Neighborhood" does the band seem to feel the very groove they have been creating and shake the hips a bit. Even on the biggest show stopper of them all, "Can't Cry Anymore" where Stroud and Freed exchange some fiery guitar work, their feet glued to the floor. On film it's a distraction. On CD it's irrelevant and the concert comes off in an entirely different manner.

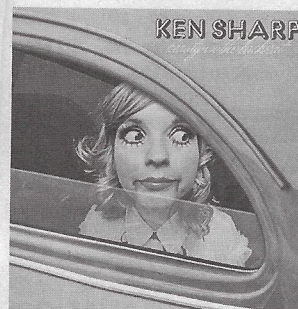
From an audio perspective, the production can seem a bit distant. But the performances and the pacing are spot on. The band is tight, and the songs rock where they should and are full-bodied when

they slow down. There aren't any real surprises here—no arrangement shifts of new interpretations. Excepting for the brief intro of "Picture" into "If It Makes You Happy" it's a straight-forward affair. I'm guessing that's the way these fans prefer it.

Eight songs that appear on the Central Park release surface here as well. But this tour offers the chance to expand the set list further and include some tracks from Crow's latest release *Be Myself* including the exceptional track "Long Way Back"—a slinky rocker with a cool chorus that just kind of cascades. Crow even adds a new song, "Atom Bomb" which is an amped up "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'."

Everything ends with an intimate performance of "I Shall Believe." There Sheryl Crow gets down close to her fans, a group of people whose love of what she does and stands for is evident in every camera sweep of the crowd. Hers is a career that could've ended quickly if not for the sheer talent and creativity that sits at the center of her music. At 56, this recording finds her at the top of her game, where all it seems that she REALLY wants to do is "have some fun." Along the way she ensures that we all do as well.

—Ray Chelstowski



### KEN SHARP BEAUTY IN THE BACKSEAT

Jet Fighter (CD)

★★★★★

Pop scribe/musician Ken Sharp is back with a new long-player, less than two years after the release of *New Mourning*, his top-notch 2016 release. *New Mourning* was widely acknowledged by critics as Sharp's finest album to date, but he eclipses those heights on *Beauty in the Backseat*. It's no coincidence that the album's title bears a close resemblance to Hall and Oates' 1977 LP *Beauty on a Back Street*; not only is Sharp now serving up

more savory slices than ever before, but then John Oates has guest appearance (groovin' "Philly Ki

Other guest stars on *the Backseat* include saxman Ace Frehley opening "Rock Sh" Kasim Sulton (on poppin' "Mona Lisa" Marshall Crenshaw a tambourine on the so-soulful "Miracles" one of Sharp's vocals). Aside from authentic soul songs originally from Ph there's a passel of often bubblegum tunes that wouldn't have of place blasting on radio in the early '70s to Lemonade," "No to Stay Together A "24 Hours a Day"—just three—are all constructed tunes of melodic sunshine, lyrical subject matter lollipops and rainbows.

Two of Sharp's recent singles also show up in *the Backseat*: "The David Bowie Died" Be David Cassidy?" propulsive, smile-inducing number that pays tribute to teenybop fave with a to-shake melody fueled by 12-string guitar and Bonfiglio's background harpsichord. As with *ing*, Sharp is aided again on the new record by multi-instrumentalist Perdomo, who helps quite nicely while he much every instrument the sun (save for when playing, of course). In tandem for sure, with sharp pop confectionery extra kick by Perdomo's thetic production and a tal know-how. The c helps make *Beauty in* another not-to-be-miss from Ken Sharp. More at ken-sharp.com.

—Joe

### AMY WINEHOUSE BACK TO BLACK Eagle Vision (Blu-ray)

★★★★★